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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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A-ONE #0209

03/03/00

~ New ST Applications! ~ People Are Talking! ~ New fVDI Released
~ Atari Today, In March! ~ VM Labs' Nuon Shortly ~ CCAG 2000 Moves!
~ Y2K Leap Day Bug Free ~ Pentium III, 1 GHz PCs ~ New Duke Nukem!
~ Governors Support Tax ~ Mac Vet Don Crabb Dies ~ Xbox For Real!

-* Dreamcast Survival In Doubt! *-
-* AOL, Time Warner Probed By Senators *-
-* Scatalogic Releases BattleSphere For Jaguar *-

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->From the Editor's Keyboard
"~~~~~"

"Saying it like it is!"

Is Mother Nature just playing around with us, or is Spring closer to reality than Puxatawney Phil predicted over a month ago? Last weekend was gorgeous! I even barbecued on Sunday, with no coat and gloves! This week was dreary, but the temperatures were unseasonably warm. I'm psyched!

The Leap Day Y2K worries appear to have been for naught. Japan seemed to be the only area in the world to experience some problems due to this Y2K phenomenon.

You realize that if the states governors fail in their attempt to stop the ban of internet taxes, they'll find another way to recoup those "losses"! Still, I hope the net tax ban passes - there's enough money being made from the internet without the government getting their greedy take as well.

Microsoft is still having its problems. Between the antitrust case and the 63,000 bugs in Windows 2000, they're a busy lot trying to keep their name out of the mud. And how about AOL and Time Warner? They're still answering questions in Washington regarding their pending merger. Interesting stuff!

Until next time...

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New ST Applications

News of the new A4 edition of ST Applications follows - please distribute widely! The next issue is complete - just waiting for advertising copy and confirmations.

We published our first Atari magazine, The ST Club Newsletter, in the Spring of 1986 - and we're still going strong. Full of invaluable information, ST Applications is an essential read for all Atari users who want to get the best out of their Atari software.

Supported by articles from contributors to Atari Computing the new-look ST Applications ensures that Atari enthusiast will have a printed magazine during the year 2000 and beyond. Issue 78 of ST Applications will herald a return to an A4 magazine-style format with lots of new features and a regular printing schedule. Existing subscribers to ST Applications will get the new-look magazine as the next issue of their subscription.

Inside each issue:

- (News - the latest Atari News from around the world.
- (Reviews and Articles - new products reviewed and 'how to' articles that help you to get the best from your Atari hardware and software.

- (Atari Online - our unique guide to the Atari online world.
- (PD and Shareware Updates - the latest Atari software news.
- (Forum - help, news, views and letters.
- (Classified Adverts - buy, sell and swap hard to find Atari gear. Adverts are free to subscribers.
- (Contacts - User Groups, Meetings, Shows, and appeals for help.
- (Emulators and Clones - keeping your Atari software alive without any Atari hardware!

Keeping the Atari market alive:

4+ issues a year - New A4 magazine format
Free classified advertising for subscribers
Advertising and publicity for Atari suppliers worldwide

Publishing in: February, April, July, October and December 2000.
Single issue: #3.50, 4-issue subscription: #12.
(Overseas rates and distribution: please email us for latest details.)

"I first contributed articles to ST Applications way back when it was a newsletter and for years it remained my favourite Atari magazine. ST Applications has always been written by enthusiasts for enthusiasts - long before we penned that phrase to promote Atari Computing. Although ST Applications never ceased publication, in recent years it was a shadow of its former self. So I'm absolutely delighted that FaST Club have decided to re-launch ST Applications in a format which gives it a chance to recapture those halcyon days and, more importantly, those ex-Atari Computing readers looking for something to read! For the first time in years, I'm looking forward to reading something I haven't already edited and also look forward to contributing articles to ST Applications. I wish everyone involved the very best of luck." Joe Connor, Atari Computing

Regards, Paul Glover

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Atari Today - New UK Atari Magazine - Free Advert Offer

Atari Today

More good news on the magazine front. Atari Today will be launched in March. This is a new A4 style magazine which includes articles from Atari developers, users as well as a round up of news, reviews and general interest articles on the Atari scene.

Each issue costs 2.50 UK Pounds and includes a cover disk. If you are a supplier of Atari hardware or software you can place a quarter or half page advertisement FREE in the first issue. We have a limited amount of space and it is let on a first come first served basis. Advertisements must be sent as a 300 or 600 dpi GIF file. This is the only format we accept for free advertisements.

Quarter Page is 90 x 130 mm
Half Page is 180 x 130 mm

You can also place 1 FREE classified advert in the magazine.
Send up to 50 words in ASCII text format. Again space is limited, so first come first served!

We have a great first issue, with games reviews, programming features, accelerator news, and more. Should be available mid March.

Bob Frost
Editor/Atari Today
BobF@techsoftware.freeweb.co.uk

fVDI v0.95 released!

From: Johan Klockars <rand@cd.chalmers.se>

The release version of fVDI v0.95 is finally here! :-)

Lots and lots of things have obviously happened since the last real release (v0.85) at the end of the summer of '98 (I promise the next version won't take as long to appear ;-), but the beta archives on my ftp site have been updated relatively often.

I won't go into detail about what's new here. You can find a list of the most important things on my WWW pages (see .sig), if you're interested. fVDI, for those who haven't heard about it, stands for the

Fenix/Free/Fast VDI

'Fenix' is a project initiated by Sven Karlsson, which aims to produce a complete replacement for MiNT/BIOS/XBIOS/GEM. fVDI is the VDI component of that and (for the time being) the only part, except for the Fenix kernel itself, that exists.

You can read more about it at <http://www.it.lth.se/~sven/Fenix/index.html> 'Free', in this case, stands for freedom in the GNU sense. That is, fVDI is placed under the GNU General Public License. In short, this means that you are free to give a copy away to anyone you like (even if you for some reason bought it in the first place (fVDI is currently supplied with the Eclipse graphics card, for example)), and that you can get at the complete sources if you want. Anything built using those sources must then also be protected by the GPL.

For more information, visit <http://www.gnu.org>

'Fast' has always been an aim for fVDI, but not to such a degree that it interferes with other design goals, such as portability and flexibility. Still, in the cases where fVDI isn't at least comparable to NVDI speedwise, it's mainly because I haven't got around to it. ;-)

The VDI, Virtual Device Interface, is the part of GEM that normally handles all drawing to the screen, printers, etc. There has always been one built into the Atari machines, but various replacements and extensions (GDOS, FontGDOS, SpeedoGDOS, NVDI, etc) have appeared over time.

fVDI can in principle handle the same job as for example NVDI, but so far only screen output is possible, and there's no vector font support. You can, however, use fVDI together with another VDI to get at your normal printer drivers, and even vector fonts if you're prepared to

sacrifice some performance.

So, what will fVDI do for you?

Even early versions were quite capable of handling all the screen output from the programs I use daily myself. With v0.85, most programs that didn't use 'advanced' graphics or text functions (for example circle drawing and text effects) worked fine. Since shortly after I got my Eclipse/RageII (prototype) card more than a year ago, I've been running under fVDI all the time.

With v0.95, very few programs should have any major problems. For example, the demo versions available on the net of Kandinsky, ArtWorx and Papyrus can all display their example images/documents on my Eclipse/RageII graphics card using nothing but fVDI (it's possible to run NVDI 'on top' if you want to, like it's done with the NOVA cards).

Like the original VDI, fVDI does circles, ellipses, pies, polygons and thick lines. However, it can also handle Bezier curves and areas in the same way as more modern VDIs.

The usual text effects (italic, bold, outline, underline, grey) are all in there, as are the normal placement methods (+ some of the newer ones). Some things are still missing, however, such as rounded rectangles, line markers, text scaling, and flood-fill.

Included in the v0.95 archive are drivers for monochrome, 16 colours and for the Eclipse/RageII (8/16/32 bit). The bitplane drivers have some limitations (for obvious reasons, I've been more interested in improving the RageII drivers), such as not handling line patterns, and the 16 colour driver only does text/icons/patterns in black and white. You can bypass these limitations by turning off specific acceleration functions (that's what the device driver primitives are called), but that is usually very slow.

Installation

Installation of fVDI can be very simple. Just rename two files (assuming that you're running in monochrome, otherwise you'll also have to change a '1' to a '4') and double click FVDI.PRG from the desktop. For more advanced installations, such as running from the AUTO-folder or making extra fonts available, you'll have to move a couple of files and edit FVDI.SYS (similar to the normal ASSIGN.SYS, but with more options). All the information you need should be in the included documentation, but if there's a problem, please email.

Naturally, any and all bug/incompatibility reports, comments, etc are very welcome.

If anyone is interested in doing some work on the bitplane drivers, or perhaps on a completely new driver of some kind, please contact me.

Benchmarks

Finally, a couple of selected test results from my Falcon+AB040, running in copyback cache mode, using TOS 4.04 with WinX (normal grow-boxes). More complete tables will be made available on my WWW pages soon. I'd be interested in results from other machines too.

I didn't 'rig' anything to make fVDI look better, but the fact that fVDI

was written with the '040 in mind will certainly skew some results (I have no idea which, or how) compared to other machines. The 'fVDI shadow' test refers to a special mode that's only of use for machines with very fast access to non-screen RAM.

For the monochrome tests, which were run in 640x400 (SM124), fVDI was started from the desktop to make the testing easier to perform. The 256 colour test was done in 640x480x8bit mode on my Eclipse/RageII, with fVDI running from the AUTO-folder.

GEMBench percentages are relative to a normal Falcon in mono and 256 colours (standard GEMBench 4.03 comparison), respectively. I also included the actual timings to make comparisons between monochrome and RageII/8bit possible.

GEMBench	----- Monochrome-----				--256 colors--			
			-----fVDI-----					
	NVDI 4.xx		normal		shadow		RageII	
	Time	%						
GEM Dialog Box	0.825	424	0.985	355	0.785	445	0.990	676
VDI Text	0.195	1743	0.205	1658	0.180	1888	0.130	5730
VDI Text Effects	0.400	1872	0.360	2080	0.360	2080	0.230	6369
VDI Small Text	0.180	2083	0.090	4166	0.090	4166	0.105	5904
VDI Graphics	1.140	765	1.650	529	1.425	612	0.350	4771
GEM Window	0.545	256	0.590	237	0.535	261	0.320	1171
Blitting	0.790	141	0.735	152	0.630	177	0.160	5437/69
VDI Scroll	1.165	226	1.175	224	0.815	323	0.265	5660
Justified Text	0.895	364	0.945	344	0.960	339	0.205	4634
VDI Enquire	0.070	2257	0.080	1975	0.080	1975	0.130	1576
New Dialogs	0.890	500	1.075	413	0.920	483	1.255	681/309

(fVDI doesn't draw the monochrome lines (graphics test) in XOR mode, and outline text (text effects test) is spaced differently.

Apart from that, everything should be the same, IIRC.

In the RageII column, two entries are of the form 'value1/value2'. The first number is with my default settings (blits are cached whenever fVDI decides it's appropriate) and the second is with all such caching turned off (the blits are then done to/from normal RAM.)

VDIBench (results are in 'per second', so higher are better)

Normal Text (normal)	60201	60464	68298	100548
Small Text (normal)	86961	160658	175287	158173
Thin Lines (solid single)	3568	3396	6045	14860
(solid poly)	4121	3864	7543	72619
Polygons (solid complex)	772	606	607	28823
Beziers (simple curves)	4877	10772	10542	11624
(complex curves)	2074	3608	4464	5670
(simple areas)	1003	1348	1355	9674
(complex areas)	206	385	386	4950
Rectangles (solid)	666	751	860	6466
Circles (solid)	665	279	298	1181
(outline)	875	878	1104	1319

(Quite a few tests have been skipped here, for various reasons. Some don't work as they should (VDIBench is not finished), some don't really say much extra, and some are rather uninteresting for most

people. Complete results will be available on my WWW pages.)

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->A-ONE User Group Notes! - Meetings, Shows, and Info!

""""""""""

CCAG '2000
Classic Computer And Gaming Fair 2000

Date: June 17 2000 <---NEW DATE)
(New Date due to renovations being done to the hall)

Location: National Guard Armory
Route 57, Lorain, Ohio, USA (Just 25 minutes West of Cleveland)
Cost: FREE! For both vendors and spectators!

Setup: June 16, 2000
4PM-10PM For Inside Vendors and User Groups only
Fair: June 17, 2000
9AM-6PM
"Flea Market" Vendors can start setup at 7AM

Systems: All Classic computer or gaming system: Atari, Intellelevision,
Magnavox, Commodore, TI, Amiga, Timex, ADAM, Nintendo, Sega, etc.

We will try to accommodate all late comers, but the deadline for inside
table reservations is May 9, 2000 one month before the CCAG.

Donations will be gladly accepted to help cover expenses. Remember, this
CCAG is free to both the spectators and vendors. We are located close to
several fast-food restaurant, no refreshments will be served at the CCAG.

Please stay tuned a URL will be made available shortly with a map, lodging
information and more.

For further info please contact:
CCAG 2000
P.O. Box 493
Chesterland OH 44024-0493
USA

Phone 440-979-9295 ask for Jim Jr.
fmh@netzero.net
or
jwkrych@n2net.net

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
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Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Oy, have I got a headache. If you've ever had a migraine, you know what I'm feeling like right now. Well, they say that into every life a little rain must fall. So I guess this is just another thunderstorm.

Things on the Atari scene are pretty much the same as they have been for the past several years... Big surprise, right? I mean heck, Atari has been a non-entity for more than a couple of years now and even before that they hadn't made computers for a while. Sometimes it amazes me that we still find them useful. I remember being told that our trusty STs would never be able to do what it takes to connect to the internet and surf the web. Since I was told this by a very respected member of the Atari online community, I took it for granted that it was true.

Then came STiK, STinG, CAB, NEWSie, and all the other extremely useful programs that Atari programmers around the world have provided for us. I may be stubborn or just set in my ways, but I still prefer most of the internet programs I use on my Atari computers to what's available on the PC platform. Sure, the PC programs are fast flashy and expansive, but I don't usually want or need most of the options they provide or the memory and CPU overhead they carry with them. What I want is information of one sort or another from the internet, not all the bells and whistles.

Sure, I use Netscape on the PC... both under Windows and Linux... but I'd honestly be much happier if there was a version of CAB for the PC. Simplicity and straight-forward usage are what appeal to me most. And making sure that I have the latest whiz-bang version doesn't even enter into the equation.

Well, let's get to the stuff that's being batted about on the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st Newsgroup
=====

James Schofield asks for info about hard drives:

"I am reviving a dead STe setup I have.. I had it in the Garage for a few years.. and wanted to get it up and running again..

One thing is - I have a FAST ICD interface and box. I have several SCSI HD around here.. from 100 meg to 500 meg. I am not sure anymore what it is that makes certain drives compatible or not.. can anyone help me out with that??

I could list the names and models of the drives.. and if anyone knows.. they could replay with yeah or nay as to compatibility."

Greg Goodwin tells James:

"Very few drives DON'T work. Stick one in -- if it's SCSI, it'll probably work."

James now asks:

"I also have a 16x SCSI CD rom player.. what software do I need to make it workable in the ATARI?"

And since I can't write to it and use it as storage.. is there really any point to hooking up the CD?? It is not my only PC and I work in the computer industry anyway..

Also I am running Rainbow TOS on my STE.; is this my overall best choice for primarily running games?? or is there an advantage to upgrading to 2.06??"

Greg tells James:

"Extendos (commercial) or Spin (freely distributed -- not sure if it's free or shareware as I don't use it). As for why you'd want to -- I use a CD player as my 4 year old's primary drive. He can't delete anything! As for games, stick with 1.04, 2.06 is slightly LESS capable in that department."

** Editor's note: The STE came with either TOS 1.6 or 1.62.

Jim Logan adds his experiences:

"There are a few Atari specific CD-ROMs around that you can read from. It depends on what you want to do. I have a CD writer for the Hades and find it invaluable for backups."

'Steve' joins the party and asks about hard drives:

"I know this has been asked a million times, but here goes..!"

I've got a 4gb external HD that I'm using on both a Falcon and TT. I want to simply partition it into 2 x 2gb partitions. Is this possible under the TOS OS, or am I destined for problems?

I'm using TOS 3.06 on the TT and TOS 4.04 (with FPATCH2) on the Falcon. I sometimes use MagiC, but mostly TOS on both machines."

Bruno Begni tells Steve:

"The biggest partition with TOS 4.04 is 1 gb. I don't know with the 3.06 (512 mb I believe).

If you want to use more, you must install Mint (fat32, MinixFS,...) or Magic (fat32), but you couldn't use TOS.

Otherwise you can format, for example, the first partition (C) with 500mb for compatibility between the Falcon and the TT; and the second (D) with 3,5gb (Mint or MagiC only). Or 8 partitions of 512mb each..."

Dr. Uwe Seimet, the author of HD Driver, tells Steve:

"No, this is not possible except when using FAT32 (MagiC, MiNT) or EXTFS2

(MiNT) partitions.

The maximum partition size for the TT is 512 MB, for the Falcon it's 1 GB."

Steve tells Bruno and Uwe:

"Excellent, thanks for this info... looks like I'll be creating 4 x 500mb partitions for the TT and 2 x 1gb partitions for the Falcon."

Alyre Chiasson asks for help with upgrading a TT:

"I am trying to upgrade the floppy on a TT that was given to me. The TOS dates 1990 and the machine was equipped with a 720K floppy drive. I put in a 1.4 drive and flipped dip switch 7, nothing. I have no docs but was wondering if the WD1772 chip supports HD? I have a broken Mega Ste and was wondering if the chip C302096-001A is the HD controller chip, in which case I would swap."

Our good friend Sheldon Winick tells Alyre:

"The WD1772 drive controller will not reliably support the high density floppy drive. You'll need to change it to the newer AJAX controller. I still have several of them in stock if you need one. Price is \$10 with Priority Mail shipping included (continental USA only). Email back if interested.

The AJAX chip number is C302434-001/A."

Dan Ackerman tells us that there's a...

"New CAB.OVL full package now available.

<http://www.netset.com/~baldrick/>

What's new?

Many small changes.

PUT implemented. (http method for upload *NOT* supported by all servers)

POST variant of PUT (used by e-groups)

An alert on Authentication informing you of the realm you are authorizing to use. Sometimes contains information you need for authorization.(Hi freemans ;)

Why the big version jump?

Well I thought PUT was worth a few minor version numbers.

Have fun and enjoy."

Steve Hammond tells Dan:

"The new update now allows CAB to work with the "recycler.com" log in - CAB no longer crashes!"

Steve Sweet asks Dan:

"Does this version work with iConnect??"

Dan replies:

"It should work with Ifusion and Iconnect. If I understand that properly."

Liam Proven asks about emulating the ST:

"I hardly like to ask, but I'm going to anyway..."

I recently bought an ST as part of my researches into GEM for the FreeGEM project (<http://www.deltasoft.com>.) However, as far as I can tell it is a dead one. I don't have the right monitor for it, but it appears to give a line of bombs at power-on.

It's only a 2MB MegaST, no blitter or hard disk or anything. So the UKP20 wasn't too much of a waste.

But, I do have a reasonably-specced Amiga. 68030, 10MB RAM, 400MB HD, and a SCSI interface.

So: Are there any good ST/TT emulators for the Amiga? Preferably free?"

Steve Stupple tells Liam:

"Try checking that the IC's are seated properly, if needed remove and refit. I've had a similar problem with my Mega STE.

"20 GBP isn't bad at all for a Mega ST2.. If you've given up on it, I can take it off your hands. <smile>"

Tom Rosso asks about hooking up a hard drive to his ST:

"I know that there are ways of hooking up SCSI devices to the DMA port on an ST. I've seen a cable being sold from Best Electronics to hook a SCSI hard drive up. The problem is that it's \$75. Are there instructions on how to build one of these cables yourself? Also, is there a certain type of SCSI drive that I should try to obtain. I don't know much about how SCSI works because I've never owned any SCSI devices. I remember seeing a hardware mod page somewhere on the internet a little while back, but I can't seem to find it anymore."

Nicholas Bales tells Tom:

"No there isn't really, because it's not just a cable. It's a special interface with a few specifically programmed chips. It is feasible to do one if you have experience and hardware for programming PAL firmware.

75 USD is pretty cheap actually. They used to be a lot more expensive. There are several models around, so if you buy one, make sure it handles parity.

There are also IDE interface boards available, but they cost a bit more."

Paul Mac asks for help with MagiC:

"Just a little thing, how do you make MagiC 6 boot up in a colour? All I get is a rather depressing grey."

Kevin Dermott tells Paul:

"I hope this doesn't make you suicidal then but I don't think you can, you can stop the pic showing though."

Mike Freeman jumps in and posts:

"Yes, I have Magic 6.01 on my Falcon, and since the bootup image displayed is actually a 256-color image, it would be nice to boot up in a 256-color mode instead of ST-High black and white. Changing the NVRAM graphics mode setting doesn't change anything. Magic seems to be hard coded to boot in ST-High. Is there any way to change this (i.e. setting some variable in the MAGX.INF file)? It's more or less just an aesthetic thing, but I'd love to see a beautifully colored welcoming screen! Any ideas?"

Kevin adds:

"this is not read till after it boots, there was a lot of talk about it when it was released anyway I hate the idea of hiding all that boot up info."

Steve Sweet tells Kevin, Mike, and Paul:

"If you use the menu option Change resolution to create a resolution and hit save then it will be stored in magic.inf, as #_DEV 5."

Mike explains to Steve:

"This works when you finally get to the desktop, but what I'm asking about is during the boot process, when AUTO programs are being loaded and Magic displays it's boot image. Changing the MAGX.INF file makes no difference at all. Neither does changing the NVRAM settings. I know a lot of people would rather see the scrolling text and so disable the image, but I like the simple aesthetics of it, so I'd rather have a nice image to look at while AUTO programs are loading. It would be even better if it were in color rather than ST-High."

Well folks, that's it for this week. I'm off to raid the medicine cabinet for something to get rid of this darned headache. See you again next time around, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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The news came even before a full-blown game machine war kicks off on March 4 with the launch of rival Sony Corp's PlayStation2, successor to the world's most popular game system with 70 million units sold in the past five years.

Sega's latest woes added credence to expectations that PlayStation2, with its capacity to play digital video discs (DVDs) and potentially tap the Internet, will cement Sony's number-one position in the industry.

Late last year, Sony, armed with a solid software lineup, held a 67 percent share in the world game market, followed by Nintendo Co with 29 percent and Sega with three percent.

"Judging from its weak sales at home, Sega is still facing hard times. Its future course will depend on whether and how it can win over users with Internet-based products," said Kazuko Fushimi, an analyst at ratings agency Japan Rating and Investment Information Inc.

Sega is relying on the low price of its 128-bit Dreamcast game console, which is also Internet-capable, to bolster its market share. Since debuting in November 1998, shipments of the Dreamcast, priced at 19,900 yen (\$180), have topped 4.4 million.

But the road has been a bumpy one, with slumping domestic sales already forcing the gamemaker to slash its sales estimate for the second half of the business year to March 31.

Despite strong European and U.S. sales, where Internet use is greater and the Dreamcast's online capabilities give it an edge, Sega said domestic sales of both Dreamcast hardware and software would fall far short of initial targets.

The result, it said, will be a hefty consolidated net loss of an estimated 44.9 billion yen for 1999/00, more than double its prior forecast of a 19.8 billion yen loss.

This will mark a third consecutive year in the red for Sega, which is also burdened with losses on its video game centers.

Sega now predicts domestic sales of its Dreamcast console in the September-March half-year will total just 600,000 units, barely half its original estimate of 1.1 million units.

"The latest loss estimate was a bit larger than anticipated, although I personally wasn't surprised to hear the news," said Eiji Maeda, a senior analyst at Daiwa Institute of Research. "Sega will find it hard to expand its domestic market share, but it still has some room for expansion overseas."

The troubled game maker also said on Monday it will turn to its biggest shareholder for financial help.

Sega will raise 101.38 billion yen through an allotment of new shares to information services firm CSK Corp and CSK Chairman Isao Okawa, raising their combined shareholding in Sega to 37.5 percent from 21 percent.

Sega will use the funds to redeem 44.7 billion yen in convertible bonds due to mature in September and to finance capital investment to strengthen its network business.

Sega's woes also cast a shadow over CSK, which warned it would fall into the red in 1999/00 with an estimated 9.8 billion yen group net loss.

Daiwa's Maeda said the funds from CSK would help ease fears of a possible

default on Sega's bonds. "One of the top concerns about Sega shares is the risk of default," he said.

Sega's Loss Forecast Doubles

Sega Enterprises Ltd. said Monday that its operating loss for the current fiscal year will be twice the company's previous forecast because sales of its Dreamcast video game machines and game software fell more than expected.

Japan's biggest maker of game machines said it will post a group operating loss of 44.9 billion yen (\$408.2 million) for the fiscal year that ends March 31, more than double its September forecast of a 19.8 billion yen (\$180 million).

Higher-than-expected sales in the United States and Europe during the second half of the fiscal year were outweighed by a drop in Japan, where demand during the holiday shopping season fell below expectations, the company said.

Consumer spending in Japan has been weak as the nation struggles to emerge from its longest economic slump in decades.

Sega said domestic sales of its Dreamcast game machines were about 600,000 units in the second-half, well below its September forecast of 1.1 million machines.

Meanwhile, the company said it now expects to sell just 4.3 million software games in Japan in the six months through March, less than half of its previous forecast of 8.75 million.

Sales of game machines used at amusement parks and game arcades also are expected to miss expectations, the company said.

To boost its finances, Sega said it will sell 36 million new shares for 101.38 billion yen (\$921.6 million) to CSK Corp., a computer sales and management company. CSK's chairman, Isao Ohkawa, is Sega's chairman.

Xbox Alert! Microsoft Got Game?

The truth is out there: With the purchase of 'xbox.com,' the software giant looks ready to unveil its game machine in two weeks. Will it be an industry crusher?

Microsoft is getting ready to declassify its long-secret gaming X-file.

This week the software giant completed the purchase of the xbox.com domain name, lending that much more credence to the industry buzz that it's creating a next-generation gaming platform -- known as the "Xbox" -- to compete with upcoming PlayStation 2 and Nintendo Ltd.'s device, code-named Dolphin.

Moreover, game developer UbiSoft let slip that a coming game, based on the TV series "VIP" and starring Pamela Anderson Lee, will also run on the Xbox platform when it hits shelves in the fall. The announcement hit the

wires on Friday in France.

A U.S.-based spokeswoman would not comment on the faux pas. could not be reached for comment.

The still-unannounced platform is expected to run Windows-compatible games using a console-like device that connects to the TV and can play DVDs.

Microsoft "really sees how popular the consoles really are, so they kind of want to appeal to that market," said Matt Gravett, games analyst with market watcher PC Data.

"It would be hard for an upstart to get into the market, but Microsoft has a little bit more going for it," he added dryly.

The purchase of the domain name comes two weeks before the Game Developer's Conference in San Jose, Calif., a major industry event at which Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates is scheduled to give the keynote speech. Many industry watchers expect the Xbox to be demonstrated there.

Xbox sightings filtered in from the European Computer Trade Show, where Microsoft reportedly held closed-door demonstrations for software developers. With the expertise of its WebTV Networks Inc. subsidiary, the company could easily support Internet features, such as chat and multiplayer gaming, in the device as well.

Sources familiar with Microsoft's plans expect the devices to use either Celeron processor or Advanced Micro Devices Inc.'s Athlon processor, in addition to 64MB of memory, a 4GB hard drive and the latest graphics chip from Nvidia Inc.

From Universal Plug and Play -- a Microsoft-led initiative designed to link all sorts of appliances in one huge data network -- to the company's WebTV set-top box bringing Internet into the living room, Microsoft has signaled its intent to be a major player in the coming home-appliance market.

Since roughly half the homes in the United States still don't have a PC, the Redmond, Wash., giant has had to rethink its PC-centric strategy.

There's little mystery to Microsoft's motives.

The new goal could give the giant a large part of the approximately \$7 billion that the interactive entertainment industry pulled in last year and a heavy portion of the \$300 million generated by DVD player sales in 1999.

"There are three major sources of revenue (in the living room): games, Internet and TV," said Alan Yates, director of marketing for the WebTV platforms division, in an August interview. "The people that put together the most compelling product based on a combination of those subsidies will be very successful."

But will Microsoft get the mix right?

The 3DO Company announced Monday that the highly anticipated Crusaders of Might and Magic game for the PlayStation game console has shipped to retailers in North America and online. The release of this game marks two significant debuts: the first expansion of the hugely popular Might and Magic brand to the PlayStation game console and the first entry of the brand into the 3-D action category. To date, well over four million units have been sold worldwide in the Might and Magic universe, and the games have been translated into more than 12 languages.

Combining real-time third-person action with role-playing elements, the Crusaders of Might and Magic game is a 3-D action-fantasy thriller that challenges players in the tradition of the best-selling Might and Magic series. This is a game of spell-binding and addictive entertainment where the player is capable of heroic exploits as he travels through an incredible world of ever challenging puzzles, daunting quests, gruesome monsters, and fierce combat.

''The Crusaders of Might and Magic game is another example of how we are expanding our core brands across multiple game categories and platforms," said Trip Hawkins, chairman and CEO of The 3DO Company. ''By creating an action game set in this enormously popular universe, we get to introduce a whole new segment of gamers to the fun of Might and Magic."

Drake, a loner, toughened by exposure, hardship, and a life of fighting the scourge that destroyed his family as a boy, is swept up into the midst of a new Crusade. He must join the High Guard as they try to rid the lands of the Legion of the Fallen. With swords and sorcery, Drake must fight his way through five distinct realms. From the spires of the Citadel to the murky depths of Duskwood, Drake will run, jump, duck, fight and cast spells as he becomes ever more powerful, and eventually challenges the leader of the dead army himself. Non-linear game play allows players to venture back and forth between levels and environments.

Duke Nukem Scores Big With His Newest Game for the PlayStation Game Console: Planet of the Babes

Babes. Lots of them in desperate need of help. That's all the argument necessary to recruit gaming's undisputed King of Action into saving a planet as GT Interactive Software unleashes Duke Nukem: Planet of the Babes for the PlayStation game console. Developed by n-Space, Duke Nukem: Planet of the Babes is slated to hit stores in May, and features white-knuckling combat through interactive, high-resolution 3D environments. With scores of new weapons, enemies and advanced artificial intelligence, Duke is in for the fight of his heroic life.

''Planet of the Babes shoots high and scores, a true milestone release in the Duke Nukem franchise," said Tony Kee, Vice President of Marketing for GT Interactive. ''Planet of the Babes delivers mature, compelling game play that pushes the envelope with no-holds-barred combat, high-resolution graphics, a new and very innovative Duke survival system that replaces the typical health system found in all other shooters, and lest we forget, lots of babes."

In Earth's distant future, an alien race has launched a full-scale invasion, sinking the human population into anarchy and terror. The aliens then embark on their hideous primary objective: wiping out the male population so they can enslave women for use in their hybridization

program. However, some women managed to escape, and united to form the Unified Babe Resistance (UBR).

But the scanty UBR defenses are being annihilated by a powerful new alien weapon, and with all hope nearly lost, they turn to Earth's long distant history and legendary hero, Duke Nukem. Using a time portal device, the UBR track down Duke and make his choice very simple: Help them or there will be no chicks in the future. Without hesitation, Duke answers, ''Let's Rock."

Features Include:

- * Innovative ''Ego" based health system for Duke Nukem, who will gain and lose Ego based on his actions in the game;
- * 24 fully detailed levels including 14 single player levels, 4 challenging training areas, and 6 multiplayer levels, all packed with explosive secret areas;
- * High-tech inventory including Infra-red goggles, Jetpack, Teleporter, GasMask and Duke's High-tech Shades Operating System!
- * Arsenal of weapons including Blaster, Flamer, RPG, and Grenade Launcher; plus Duke's new official weapon the golden Desert Eagle; each weapon also includes an auto-aiming option;
- * Over 20 Deadly new enemies including Mutant Gorillas, Chimpanzees and Orangutans, Hunter Killer Babes, Hoglodytes, plus perennial favorites such as Pig Cops and Octabrain;
- * Mission Based game play featuring more than 25 real-time cinematic sequences to advance the plot. Also featuring un-lockable 'blooper' outtakes;
- * Intense first person perspective multi-player support for two-players, featuring three modes of split-screen viewing;
- * Improved controls! Planet of the Babes offers jumping, climbing, swimming, jetpacking and zero gravity exploration. Also, Duke will ''auto-action" things like opening doors, or simple actions like climbing short ledges, making game play more user-friendly.

Duke Nukem: Planet of the Babes is slated for release in May at a suggested retail price of \$49.95. Additional information can be found on the World Wide Web at <http://www.duke-nukem.com>

Fox Interactive Announces the Shipment of ''Die Hard Trilogy 2: Viva Las Vegas" for PlayStation

Fox Interactive announced Tuesday that it shipped ''Die Hard Trilogy 2: Viva Las Vegas" (DHT2) for PlayStation to retail stores nationwide.

This thrill-packed game featuring Die Hard's hero, John McClane, is available at an estimated street price of \$44.98.

Set in action-capital of the world, Las Vegas, ''DHT2" highlights three different game styles, including third person action/adventure, first-person sharpshooting and extreme driving sequence. As with the hot-selling original title, the sequel provides a variety of game options. Gamers can play through one continuous, plot-driven storyline in Movie Mode, maneuver through an entire level in Arcade Mode, or simply sharpen skills in Practice Mode.

''DHT2' will catch the attention of 'Die Hard' fans everywhere - whether it's watching McClane blow up Las Vegas or speeding through the scenic

Nevada deserts," stated Dave Shaw, executive director, worldwide brand marketing. "'DHT2' delivers another three-in-one blowout gaming experience."

The game also supports an impressive selection of peripherals ranging from digital and analog game controllers, light gun, steering wheel and PlayStation mouse. Furthermore, "'DHT2" offers an awesome music soundtrack originally arranged by top Electronica star BT and the title rap song by new hip-hop artist, Lil' Zane.

3DO Ships Army Men For Game Boy Color

The 3DO Company announced that the Army Men game for Game Boy Color has shipped to retail outlets throughout North America and online. This release marks the debut on a handheld platform of the best-selling Army Men brand, which has proved so popular with game players of all ages.

Players command Sarge in an epic battle against the evil Tan Army. In over 25 action-packed missions covering two different terrains, you must sneak behind enemy lines, overtake vehicles, secure war plans, and eliminate the Tan adversary. Pick up a variety of destructive weapons like grenades and flamethrowers and drive high-powered military vehicles to complete your mission objectives.

"The Army Men games have been such a hit with both casual and rabid game players that we're pleased to extend the fun to the ever-growing Game Boy Color audience," said Trip Hawkins, chairman and CEO of The 3DO Company.

3DO Ships Sammy Sosa Softball Slam for the PC and PlayStation

The 3DO Company Tuesday announced that it has begun shipping the PC CD-ROM and PlayStation game console versions of the Sammy Sosa Softball Slam game to retail outlets throughout North America and online shopping sites. A fantastic new style of action game and the first softball-themed title ever to appear on these platforms, the Sammy Sosa Softball Slam game accurately recreates the fast, simple, hard-hitting and ultra-addictive style of one of America's favorite pastimes.

Designed to be instantly accessible to players of all ages, genders, and abilities, the Sammy Sosa Softball Slam game allows players to test their skills against Sosa and his Sluggers or add Sosa to their roster as they face off against the wildest teams ever to hit the field. Choosing from one of three difficulty settings or Family Mode, anyone can compete in single player games or an 8 player tournament with both normal and stereotypical male and female players, ranging from the weekend athlete to the guy with the huge gut. Thanks to the included player editor and the availability of infinite combinations of all-male, all-female, and co-ed leagues, softball fans won't ever have trouble finding competition, whether they're in the mood to play an exhibition game or an entire season.

Created by the team responsible for High Heat Baseball, the game incorporates true-to-life physics and AI with a play model that is designed to offer a direct contrast to the complex, detailed sports simulations that have flooded the market in recent years. An action-packed, high-scoring

game without a heavy emphasis on statistics or set-up, the Sammy Sosa Softball Slam game boasts an intuitive control scheme and efficient interface coupled with an intense, over-the-top presentation that includes dynamic camera action cuts, exhilarating special effects, side-splitting animations, and the boisterous commentary of Larry "Monster Truck" Huffman. PC owners will find that the game has been enhanced through support for the latest 3D audio and visual technologies, including Direct3D, AMD 3D Now!, and EAX.

"With over 50 million Americans actively participating in organized leagues, softball has long established itself as one of the country's most popular recreational activities," said Trip Hawkins, chairman and CEO of The 3DO Company. "In a marketplace that has been inundated with simulations whose learning curve extends further than most people's patience, 3DO is pleased to offer for the first time ever a definitive answer to the public's demand for an intuitive and incredibly playable game that does justice to the sport."

Jeremy McGrath Supercross 2000 for Nintendo 64 Races onto Store Shelves

Acclaim Sports Monday announced that Jeremy McGrath Supercross 2000 for the Nintendo 64 has shipped to retail outlets nationwide. The game will also be released for Game Boy Color, the PlayStation game console and Sega Dreamcast later this spring. Jeremy McGrath Supercross 2000 is the follow-up title to the smash hit Jeremy McGrath Supercross 98, which was recently added to the official PlayStation game console "Greatest Hits" program.

"Jeremy McGrath has propelled Supercross into the national spotlight, and we expect his popularity to broaden the reach of the sport to the casual gamer," said Steve Felsen, Brand Director of Extreme Sports, Acclaim Entertainment. "Jeremy McGrath Supercross 2000 is as close as you get to actually experiencing what it's like to be Jeremy 'Showtime' McGrath."

Jeremy McGrath Supercross 2000 utilizes an all-new racing engine which features state-of-the-art graphics, physics, and motion. Gamers will be able to race against the legendary Supercross champion Jeremy "Showtime" McGrath, Greg Albertyn, Sebastien Tortelli, and other superstar riders on a full season circuit using 125cc and 250cc bikes. Jeremy McGrath Supercross 2000 also features eight supercross stadium courses, eight licensed motocross tracks, a custom 3D track editor, motion-captured riders, authentic rider uniforms and bike designs, and an over-the-top stunt competition exclusively featuring rookie phenom Travis Pastrana, the winner of last year's X-Games freestyle competition.

McGrath, an avid gamer, worked as a consultant to the game developers and provided insight into track design, racing strategies, and bike physics. The game also features commentary from McGrath as players race through indoor and outdoor circuits.

"I'm stoked the game is out. It definitely captures the excitement and energy of Supercross racing, so I know fans are going to love it," said McGrath, who has already posted five wins in the Supercross season's first seven races.

McGrath joins a select group of professional athletes including Brett

Favre, Chris Webber, Derek Jeter and Dave Mirra who serve as spokesmen for Acclaim Sports' titles. McGrath will be featured on all packaging, merchandising, and advertising for the game. Additionally, to further promote the title, McGrath will appear at Acclaim's booth during the 2000 Electronic Entertainment Expo in Los Angeles, from May 11-13, 2000.

Since he began racing in 1989, McGrath has set countless records. Considered the Michael Jordan of Supercross, he has captured the 250cc Supercross title six times and holds the record for the most career wins and championships. McGrath rides for Chaparral Yamaha.

Electronic Arts Ships Superbike 2000 for the PlayStation

Fly through the corners, push the tach into the red in the straightaways and maneuver 150 horses in an endless quest for the perfect line -- or you are toast!

Previously only available to the elite superbike racer, Electronic Arts announced Wednesday that Superbike 2000 is shipping for the PlayStation and the PC, bringing home one of the fastest and refined motorcycle racing simulations ever. This is the first time that EA SPORTS Superbike has been available for the PlayStation.

Superbike 2000 is exclusively licensed by SBK Superbike World Championship and combines stunning graphics, a sophisticated physics model and AI (artificial intelligence) that immerses gamers into the world of high-speed Superbike racing. PC gamers will enjoy the depth of gameplay, including Internet play, and unparalleled graphic presentation of the Superbike franchise. Console gamers will be drawn in by the over-the-top race experience which features an ease-of-entry front end, split screen racing, simulation mode, and arcade-style gameplay.

"Superbike 2000 is an amazing video game and helpful tool for the North American rider who once only had video tape to help prepare for the Superbike World Championship Series," said Ben Bostrom of Team Ducati. "Riders can now become familiar with the subtle nuances of the toughest superbike raceways in the world, and optimize the bike setup, without sacrificing their body to do so." Eric and Ben Bostrom are featured on the PC version of Superbike 2000 and served as consultants on Superbike 2000 franchise.

To master Superbike 2000, with hopes of winning a Superbike World Championship, racers will have to become intimately familiar with the user-selectable factory bikes from Aprilia, Ducati, Honda, Kawasaki, Suzuki and Yamaha. The game features 13 international Superbike circuit raceways from the 1999 season: Phillip Island, Donington, Monza, Brands Hatch, Assen, Sugo, Misano, Hockenheim, Laguna Seca, Al Ring, Kyalana and Nurburgring.

"The Superbike franchise has been a fantastic addition to the Motor Sports division of EA SPORTS," said Carolyn Feinstein, Director of Motor Sports Marketing, Electronic Arts. "Superbike is an intense sport with international appeal, helping us broaden the reach of the EA SPORTS brand. It's also an excellent complement to our other licensed Motor Sports game lineup that includes NASCAR, EA SPORTS Supercross, and the upcoming release of our first F1 title, F1 2000."

EA SPORTS, using motion capture technology, was able to capture riders gestures and moves by attaching reflective balls to actual riders and bikes. The reflective balls signal back to a computer the data necessary to recreate these actions in the video game. Capturing rider and bike motions enhances the game with greater realism while racing and crashing. Casual gamers and superbike fanatics will appreciate the level of detail captured from the subtle hand gestures of controlled braking, throttle, shifting to the rider pile-ups or hitting the wall at over 150 plus mph. User-controllable rider gestures let gamers communicate how they feel about competitor riding styles with hand gestures.

North American superbike sensations Ben and Eric Bostrom are featured in the PC version along with a host of international riders. International PC and PSX superbike riders include 3-time superbike champion Carl Fogarty, Akira Yanagawa, Colin Edwards, Gregorio Lavilla, Pierfrancesco Chili, Peter Goddard, Troy Corser, Igor Jerman, Andreas Meklau, Carlos Macais, Lucio Pedercini, Dorian Romboni, Katsuki Fujiwara, Vittoriano Guareschi, Jiri Mrkyvka, Vladimir Karban, Jean-Pierre Jeandat, Frederic Protat, Robert Ulm, Lance Isaacs, Alessandro Gramigni, Giuliano Sartoni, Noriyuki Haga, Mauro Lucchiari and Aaron Slight.

Electronic Arts Revs Up With Mobil 1 Rally Championship for Both the PC and the PlayStation

Electronic Arts is shipping Mobil 1 Rally Championship, a game that reflects the premiere rally racing championship of Europe, for the PC and the PlayStation console system. The game features a super-realistic ride through the lush British countryside on 400-plus miles of track that are composed of both on and off road segments, including brilliantly rendered bona fide English country roads. Players will enjoy more than 20 licensed cars, highly detailed weather effects and realistic car damage that affects car performance and overall gameplay. The PC version of the game is available in stores now, and the PlayStation game will be available in mid-March.

Using actual footage, detailed maps and photographs, the development team set out to make the most realistic courses to date and they have taken the checkered flag! Mobil 1 Rally Championship encompasses all 36 stages of the Official British Rally Championship. Rally fans will also have the freedom to drive off the track and race virtually anywhere they wish.

Mobil 1 Rally Championship features licensed, customizable cars such as the VW Golf A7, Nissan Almura and the Honda Civic. Each car comes with strikingly realistic graphics and car physics, from accurate modeling of crashes to power sliding. Players will also enjoy dynamic car damage that affects gameplay. A driver who repeatedly crashes the car will find it becoming deformed and its performance decreasing rapidly, ultimately totaling the car and forcing the player to drop out of the race. Drivers race using several camera views, including a detailed 3-D dashboard view which can be maneuvered to show all of the cockpit.

Mobil 1 Rally Championship provides a true feel for the race course. It features incredibly detailed weather effects that challenge the driver and often change gameplay. Racers must contend with sunlight at different times of the day, sometimes causing a blinding glare. Players also must deal with hard driving rain and lightning, which makes for slick dangerous roads, and snow, which hampers visibility and performance. Raindrops will streak

across windshields and are swiped off by windshield wipers. Other effects include dirt and gravel spitting from all four tires as they slide around corners, cars splashing through puddles and collecting mud on their bodies as they race. In addition, the game offers fully animated drivers and co-pilots that can be seen outside the car.

Mobil 1 Rally Championship comes with several exciting game modes. The PC version offers five modes of play including Time Trial, Arcade where the player races against three other artificial intelligent cars and Trophy, where it is a race against the clock for the championship. In multiplayer mode, the PC version also supports up to four players over a local area network (LAN). PlayStation offers four modes of gameplay. In multiplayer mode, the PlayStation version supports up to two players on split-screen. In addition, the PlayStation version of the game supports Dual Shock controllers.

Mobil 1 Rally Championship was developed by Magnetic Fields (PC) and Hot Gen (PlayStation) and is being published by Electronic Arts in North America. The game carries an ESRB rating of 'E' (Everyone) and has a MSRP of US\$29.95 (PC) and US\$39.95 (PlayStation).

"WWF SmackDown!" for PlayStation Slams Into Retail

THQ Inc. and JAKKS Pacific Inc. Wednesday announced the release of "WWF SmackDown!" for the PlayStation game console.

Based upon the No. 1 program on UPN, 'WWF SmackDown!' marks the first PlayStation release under the 10-year THQ/JAKKS video game license with World Wrestling Federation Entertainment Inc. Developed by expert wrestling game developers Yuke's Co., Ltd. of Japan, the game is now available at major retail outlets nationwide.

'WWF SmackDown!' is the first WWF-branded video game to integrate the in-depth backstage storylines, including the ability to make and break alliances, that have made the WWF television programs so successful. The game features an extensive list of game-play options and an up-to-date line-up of WWF Superstars including The Rock, Triple H and Chyna. 'WWF SmackDown!'s" robust season mode includes tag team partners, rivalries, and TV and Pay-Per-View events.

Players can brawl in the ring or behind the scenes in detailed environments including the boiler room, loading dock, kitchen and parking lot. Also, using the Create-A-Wrestler mode, players can build their own wrestlers and customize their height and weight, detailed move selection, and personality and mentality variables. Unsurpassed graphics and effects, including skin textures and realistic lighting and shadows, bring the 'WWF SmackDown!' set to life on PlayStation like never before.

'THQ has married the No. 1 license in Sports-Entertainment and the best PlayStation wrestling game development team in the world for what looks to be the biggest PlayStation launch in company history," stated Alison Locke, senior vice president of sales and marketing, THQ. 'Pre-orders at retail are incredibly strong, and we look forward to topping the PlayStation charts with 'WWF SmackDown!''

'The momentum hasn't waned since the release of the first THQ/JAKKS Pacific joint venture hit, 'WWF WrestleMania 2000' for Nintendo 64,"

stated Maureen Kassal, senior vice president of sales and marketing, JAKKS Pacific. "The World Wrestling Federation remains one of the hottest names in both the game and toy industries and continues to provide exciting media content for all of our interactive and action figure releases."

VM Labs' NUON in 2000

When the NUON platform was first announced two years ago, there was much hype revolving around what could possibly be the next big contender in the console market. Then called Project X, the technology was what many considered a Trojan horse - a gaming console that would be installed in peoples' homes without them knowing. VM Labs' intention all along has been for its NUON technology to be placed in mainstream DVD players so that consumers looking to buy DVD components would find a game-playing device installed - for little to no extra cost. It seemed like a great plan, considering the massive potential for the installed base of the DVD medium.

But that was two years ago. With still no NUON-enhanced DVD players out on the market, and a mediocre - at best - showing of software at the recent Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, one has to wonder what is in store for the NUON. Will it, as so many other mass-market gaming platforms have done in the past, suffer from lack of interest and find no market? VM Labs doesn't seem to think so. GameSpot News recently spoke with the company to find out what it hopes will happen in 2000.

VM Labs is very positive about the rollout of the first NUON-enhanced DVD players in March. Samsung will release the Extiva DVD player, labeling it a DVD/game-console hybrid (it will retail for US\$499). The company then plans to release the Extiva in both the Asian and European markets (VM Labs hinted that Europe may see it first). And other companies such as Toshiba and Motorola have hardware coming out that will make use of the NUON technology as well. MSNBC reports today that Motorola has incorporated NUON with the Power PC technology in its Streamaster Mustang set-top box series. "NUON allowed us to accept things like MP3 as they come into the market with a software solution," Roger Kozlowski, Motorola media systems division director of strategic alliances, told MSNBC. "It also gave us maximum flexibility in getting services to consumers by giving us programmable architecture." We asked VM Labs about the lack of software though. This didn't seem to be an issue for the company - software is currently not the top priority. The company is clearly pushing the NUON's multimedia aspects right now and will focus on software later. VM Labs commented that it has no intention of showing more software titles until the Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3) this May. However, it did state that a lot of titles are being worked on that have yet to be shown.

But what about third-party software? One reason the NUON sounded so enticing when it was first announced was because the platform had a strong lineup of third-party developers on board to create software for it. Such heavy hitters as Capcom, Crave, Activision, Psygnosis, Fox Interactive, and THQ were all on the roster - confirming that the NUON could very well provide the goods in the software arena. But where were the third-party games at the recent CES? We asked these developers to comment.

Fox Interactive told GameSpot News, "We currently do not have any titles in development. In the future if it makes sense for a project, we will consider the platform." A spokesperson for Activision stated, "I don't have any information on NUON software so I'm not able to comment." We then

Unfortunately, I haven't heard a thing." Crave could do no better, commenting, "At this time Crave is currently evaluating the platform." Psygnosis, now owned by Sony, stated, "We are concentrating on developing product for PlayStation and PlayStation2 and will not be developing for platforms that might be competitors to Sony." Capcom had no comment. It appears that every big-name publisher has decided to pass on developing products for the NUON. And what about smaller developers who think the NUON has promise? One company, which asked to remain anonymous, stated that it did find the NUON business model somewhat enticing but could not find a single publisher interested in spending money on it.

It appears as though VM Labs' priorities have shifted since the NUON was announced two years ago. As a company made up of many ex-Atari and Sony employees (Joe Sousa, former head of Sony's Product Evaluation Group; Scott Hunter, former Sony account executive; Mike Fulton, former Sony performance analyzer; Pratip Fatehpuria, former Sony senior support engineer; Bill Rehbock, former Sony VP of research and development), VM Labs was at one point a gaming company. Now it seems as though VM Labs is primarily interested in its NUON technology and in flexing its multimedia muscle. In our conversations, the company clearly stressed to us that it hopes to focus on the family entertainment market - a sad point for those who once looked upon the NUON as a possible PlayStation-beater. But perhaps this is only to get the NUON into the homes of the consumer - the true Trojan horse that VM Labs once intended. Perhaps the games are yet to come.

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CAPITOLA, CA -- Scatologic Inc. is pleased to announce that the long awaited BattleSphere for the Atari Jaguar platform will soon ship, and that all profits from the game will be donated to diabetes research.

BattleSphere is the awesome full 3D networked action shooter for the Atari Jaguar. The game was developed by renowned Jaguar, NUON, PSX2 and PC developer 4Play, which recently merged with Scatologic Inc. to form the newest industry powerhouse development team.

The highly anticipated BattleSphere combines the fast-action gameplay of a first person shooter with the nonlinear aspects of a strategic campaign simulator. Also included on the same cartridge are several additional play variations which range from a pure classic arcade action game to a multi-player networked deathmatch mode, where up to 32 players can dogfight for control of the Universe. The game garnered acclaim from players when it was demonstrated at the World Of Atari show in 1998, and it has received glowing praise from industry leading publications like Next Generation Magazine and Diehard Gamefan magazine.

BattleSphere was completed several years ago, but the release has been pending for some time due to the fact that the Jaguar ceased to be a mainstream platform, and the software, tooling, and procedures required to produce cartridges were lost and had to be recreated. "The biggest hurdle was overcoming the loss of the software encryption key." said Scatologic COO, Douglas Engel, who was one of the original BattleSphere development team. Scott LeGrand, Scatologic CEO, was enthusiastic about the team's effort to recreate the missing encryption key. He commented, "Generating a unique key ourselves allowed us to produce the highest quality game cartridge, and packaging without resorting to risky unproven and expensive hardware bypassing techniques."

In an unprecedented move, Scatologic has announced that all profits from the sale of BattleSphere will be donated to diabetes research. Scatologic CTO Stephanie Wukovitz stated, "Videogames are stereotyped as a harmful influence on society, and we wanted to show that they can be a very positive factor. Donating the profits to diabetes research is our way of showing this, as well as a way to thank everyone who has helped us get this game produced."

A special autographed copy of BattleSphere is up for auction on EBay right now. As an added incentive, the high bidder's name will be digitally encoded into this very special collector's item. BattleSphere will begin full-scale shipping soon afterwards. BattleSphere is priced at only \$74.99 plus \$5.00 shipping and handling (Continental U.S.). Orders outside the continental U.S. will require additional charges depending on the destination. California residents must add 8.25% sales tax.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Veteran Mac Writer Don Crabb Dies

A disease of the pancreas claims well-known chronicler of the Apple and Macintosh communities. He was 44.

Veteran Mac journalist Don Crabb died Saturday after being hospitalized since December with a disease of the pancreas. He was 44.

Crabb was well known in the high-tech industry, having written more than 4,000 articles about computing and Apple Computer since 1979. His syndicated column for the Chicago Sun-Times, "Crabb on Computers" appeared in 253 newspapers. He was a contributing editor or columnist for many major Mac publications including MacWEEK, Macworld Magazine, MacToday and MacTech.

Crabb took to the airwaves as well, appearing regularly on the Fox News Channel and other news programs as a technology analyst. He also had his own radio program each Saturday on WGN-AM 720 in Chicago.

In addition to his writing and television ventures, Crabb was an associate director of graduate and undergraduate studies in computer science, departmental counselor, director of instructional laboratories and a senior lecturer at The University of Chicago. He taught undergraduate, graduate and professional computing courses as well as computer science courses since 1979.

In a message posted to the MacFixIt Web site community message boards, university student Ted Pollari remembered Crabb as "an advocate for taking life head on ... but always with a smile. I feel truly blessed to have had him in my life, especially my academic life ... and I only wish I could have learned more from him."

David Morgenstern, former editor of MacWEEK, wrote, "The Mac community has lost a fine person and a great advocate for the platform."

In other remembrances posted to the board, friends and colleagues remembered Crabb as a straight-forward writer who was always willing to share his extensive knowledge of the industry with whomever needed his help.

At his personal Web site, www.doncrabb.com, Crabb identified himself as a "professional computer geek" who loved his five cats and dreamed of someday owning a winery in California's Napa Valley.

Crabb was born March 25, 1955 in Chillicothe, Ohio. He was recently engaged to be married to Janet Viane. He is survived by parents Marilyn and Donald Eugene Crabb; his sister, Diane McHenry; and his grandfather.

Leap Year Limps Out As Computer Headache

Leap Year Day tripped up computers around the world in relatively minor ways on Tuesday, authorities said, as once-giant fears stirred by the Year 2000 technology bogey largely went out with a whimper.

Japan reported what may have been the biggest glitches sparked by computer-program failures to recognize the 29th of February, a special leap day that falls only once in 400 years.

Chief spokesman Mikio Aoki said the government had let down its guard after

Jan. 1, when computers generally avoided the pitfall of confusing 2000 and 1900.

"Because everything went well then, there is no denying we were negligent this time," he said.

About 1,200 post office cash dispensers failed out of a total 25,000 because of date-related problems, Japan's Post and Telecommunications Ministry said.

A date-related glitch also struck Japan's weather bureau for the second straight day, prompting computers at 43 offices to file botched temperature and precipitation readings.

February gets an extra day in years evenly divisible by four except in centennial years, when the extra day is added only if the year is evenly divisible by 400. Thus 2000 is the first leap year of its kind since 1600, a rule that some programmer apparently missed.

Officials in the United States, the most technologically dependent nation, reported only a handful of date-related glitches despite the resurrection of a \$50 million center to track glitches.

The U.S. Coast Guard reported a leap year rollover anomaly in the archiving module of its message processing system, President Clinton's top Y2K aide, John Koskinen, said.

The failure of the archive component prompted the Coast Guard to rely on a fallback while the problem is sorted out, he said.

At Offut Air Force Base south of Omaha, Nebraska, a leap day glitch disrupted a data base that tracks aircraft maintenance parts for the 55th wing, responsible for global surveillance.

Air Force Tech. Sgt. Will Ackerman, a spokesman at Offut, said the glitch caused "no mission stoppage" as personnel went back to pencil and paper to track inventory, supposedly for a single day, when the data base is expected to recognize March 1.

Koskinen said a date-related glitch set back baggage handling at Washington D.C.'s Reagan National airport, causing longer check-in lines than normal.

Other potentially troublesome dates have also come and gone in the past year without significant disruption.

These included April 9, 1999 -- the 99th day of the year; the Aug. 22 rollover of the Global Positioning System, a popular navigation tool; and Sept. 9 which, when written as 9-9-99, could have been confused as an end-of-file marker, causing systems to shut down.

Koskinen, a presidential assistant, said the leap day rollover was "the last day we'll be concerned about at a national level," though end-of-quarter and end-of-year tallies could still reflect glitches.

Overall, the leap day problems, as expected, were minimal, said Bruce McConnell, head of the World Bank-funded International Y2K Cooperation Center.

"Basically, this is what we predicted: no major disruptions but minor glitches that are all being handled by the organizations responsible for

them," he said in a telephone interview.

In Bulgaria, a system used by police to issue new documents failed to find a proper expiry date five or 10 years hence because there is no February 29 in 2005 and 2010.

The system defaulted to 1900, police told a Sofia-based center that tracked the Year 2000 issue, according to Grozdan Karadzhov, coordinator of the Sofia-based center.

In New Zealand, minor problems hit banks. New Zealand's Y2K Readiness Commission chairman Basil Logan said: "The problem is not widespread and affects a few merchants using electronic banking transaction systems."

Separately, a special U.S. Senate Y2K Committee said on Tuesday that the estimated \$200 billion spent worldwide to dodge Year 2000 computer problems averted what would have been a crisis.

"It is the committee's judgement that the level of effort was justified and the expenditure of funds was indeed necessary," said the bipartisan panel, chaired by Robert Bennett, a Utah Republican, and co-chaired by Christopher Dodd, a Connecticut Democrat.

Microsoft Feels Heat of Legal Battles, First Win2K Bugs

The Windows 2000 party is over, leaving Microsoft Corp. to sweep up the operating system's bugs and plug its security holes while facing the stark reality of antitrust and other legal battles.

Closing arguments in the Department of Justice antitrust trial this week provided another indication of how U.S. District Judge Thomas Penfield Jackson is expected to rule unless the two parties settle, observers said.

As he has done at various stages of the trial, Jackson showed open skepticism to arguments from Microsoft attorneys, this time when they tried to invoke copyright law as a defense for integration of features and products into Windows.

"What evidence of copyright have you given me? What testimony was there?" Jackson asked. "I don't really understand your copyright defense."

When Microsoft counsel John Warden tried to placate the judge, saying he wasn't implying copyright law trumped antitrust law, Jackson interrupted, "I'm not so sure of that."

"The government at this point absolutely has the upper hand. Their only impetus to settle is to avoid being overturned in appellate court," said Hillard Sterling, an antitrust lawyer with Gordon and Glickson LLC, in Chicago. "Settlement talks will reach a feverish pitch this week, and if they don't settle now, they won't."

Jackson is expected to announce his judgment soon but can delay his ruling as long as settlement talks are ongoing.

Microsoft is still mum on any contingency plans the company has if it loses the decision. Some observers speculate that Microsoft won't settle, opting instead to tie the case up in appellate court for years, thus

eroding the relevance of the suit.

Microsoft customers continue to have mixed reactions on how the trial affects their daily IT lives.

"We say, best leave it to the lawyers," said Henry Nash, director of development at Credit Suisse First Boston, in London. "I'm not concerned, and it doesn't affect my plans."

On the flip side, an IT manager at a major aerospace company that's adopting Windows 2000 said he's taking a keen interest in the trial and its outcome.

"We'd like to know their contingency plans," said the IT manager, who requested anonymity. "Not knowing what's going to happen, especially when things look this bad, leaves you uneasy."

Across the board, however, IT managers say they wish the nagging legal issues would go away. For Microsoft, they're only increasing. The European Commission, for example, is looking into complaints that Microsoft is unfairly tying its desktop and server operating systems.

Microsoft officials in Redmond, Wash., said they are cooperating fully with the EC and expect to be exonerated.

On top of the government lawsuits, Microsoft is facing more than 100 class action lawsuits claiming consumer harm resulting from Microsoft's desktop monopoly.

Microsoft spokesman Jim Cullinan maintains that legal distractions have had no effect on day-to-day operations at the company.

"What these class action lawsuits fail to recognize is that Microsoft's actions result in more innovation, better technology and lower prices," Cullinan said.

While the legal actions swirl around Microsoft, its customers are starting to grapple with the application compatibility and other technical issues as they begin rolling out Windows 2000.

One major company had to roll back an order for thousands of copies of Symantec Corp.'s pcAnywhere after finding that it crashed Windows 2000.

"The only fix we've found is to reboot Windows [2000 Professional] in safe mode and uninstall pcAnywhere," said an IT manager for the company who requested anonymity. "It's this kind of thing we were hoping to avoid."

Separately, online bug tracking site BugNet confirmed what could be a more serious problem -- a security flaw in Active Directory that allows network administrators to give themselves access rights to restricted areas even after their rights have been limited.

Microsoft vehemently denied the charge in a statement that said the confusion stems from a misunderstanding of Active Directory's security model.

America Online Chairman Steve Case and Time Warner Chairman Gerald Levin returned to Capitol Hill on Thursday, defending their giant merger of old and new media companies for the second time this week.

But lawmakers on the Senate Commerce Committee's telecommunications subcommittee focused most of their questions on general Internet policy issues, like privacy, taxation and telephone service subsidies.

Two days ago, the two executives faced more hostile questioning from the Senate Commerce Committee focused on the companies' pledge to share Time Warner's high-speed Internet over cable service with competing Internet service providers.

Some Senators on the Commerce subcommittee expressed similar skepticism, but much of the hearing was spent discussing general issues.

Case said AOL, the No. 1 online service, still favored voluntary industry rules to safeguard the privacy of consumers, but added he would be willing to discuss possible legislative proposals if Congress determined that new laws were needed.

'I'd like to believe we could continue to make progress through these industry initiatives," Case said, adding that AOL would not have an 'allergic reaction" opposing possible legislation.

'We look forward to having a dialogue," he said.

Several Democrats on the panel pressed Case to go further and lay out specific principles for legislation, but he declined.

'It is going to happen," said Nevada Democrat Richard Bryan. With so many Internet users worried about privacy, 'this Congress or a future Congress is going to respond."

Oregon Democrat Ron Wyden warned of an 'Exxon Valdez" of privacy, referring to the famous oil tanker spill that galvanized support for environmental legislation.

After Case and Levin left, consumer and Internet groups raised some objections to the \$133 billion deal.

Gene Kimmelman, co-director of the Washington office of Consumers Union, said antitrust regulators should block the merger unless the companies made substantial changes, including severing links between Time Warner and AT&T Corp., the largest cable operator.

'Coming on the heels of massive consolidation in the cable television industry, the proposed merger of AOL with Time Warner poses enormous dangers for the preservation of vibrant Internet competition," Kimmelman said.

Congress Asked Not To Ban Net Taxes

Governors worried about damage that tax-free Internet commerce could do to their state budgets demanded Tuesday that Congress refrain from permanently outlawing state sales taxes on electronic purchases.

After a private meeting with most members of the Senate, Govs. Mike Leavitt, R-Utah, and Parris Glendening, D-Md., said ``four out of five" members of the National Governors' Association oppose a total ban such as that advocated by Sen. John McCain of Arizona, a GOP presidential candidate.

``That would create havoc among states," Glendening said.

Glendening said the federal government and the states have about two years to reach consensus on how to apply existing sales-tax laws to electronic commerce. Without an agreement, governors fear that fast-moving technology will effectively impose a ban, threatening roughly \$150 billion in tax revenue for services such as schools, roads and law enforcement.

The goal, Leavitt said, should be to create a uniform sales-tax system for sellers of all kinds: traditional retail stores, catalogs, Internet outlets and toll-free telephone peddlers.

``We have to decide whether we create a permanent special privilege for one method of selling, or whether we create a level playing field," Leavitt said. ``We believe we have to move to a level playing field. There are a lot of questions to answer as to how we get there."

Some governors and many members of Congress disagree. House Majority Leader Dick Armey, R-Texas, said Tuesday that lawmakers should have a ``firm and clear" commitment to keeping the Internet free of taxes.

``The Internet is the future of commerce," Armey said. ``I want to assure the 55 million Americans who shop online that we are firmly committed to a tax-free Internet."

Later this year, Congress is likely to consider legislation extending or making permanent the current three-year moratorium on taxes that single out the Internet, such as those on access or digital downloads. Most governors agree with that moratorium, but what to do about sales taxes is another question.

Leavitt, chairman of the governors association, is also a member of a commission created by Congress to recommend future Internet tax policy. Its report is due in April, but there is no consensus about what to do.

In an effort to reach agreement, Leavitt said the governors association is revising its Internet sales-tax proposal in three key ways:

- Exempting small Internet sellers from collecting sales taxes until they reach a specified minimum business volume.

- Scrapping a proposal for creation of a ``trusted third party" to collect and remit sales taxes. Instead, a way would be developed to adapt the current system.

- Extension of the moratorium on taxes that single out the Internet, which expires in October 2001.

1-GHz Pentium III Computers Coming This Month

Consumers will likely be able to buy PCs containing 1-GHz chips later this

month, a lurch forward in the release date of these systems, sources said Thursday.

Hewlett-Packard will start shipping consumer PCs containing Intel's Pentium III running at 1 GHz (1,000 megahertz) later this month, sources at HP said. Corporate computers containing these chips won't come out until June.

Likewise, IBM is expected to make an announcement regarding 1-GHz systems next week, sources said. With the anticipation building around 1-GHz systems, consumers should be able to buy whatever computers are available soon after the shipping dates.

The release of these computers could hand Intel a symbolic victory over rival Advanced Micro Devices. Since last August, when AMD first released its Athlon processor, the two companies have been engaged in a game of leapfrog with regard to chip speed. When AMD released a 750-MHz Athlon late last year, for instance, Intel accelerated the release of an 800-MHz Pentium III. AMD followed shortly afterward with an 850-MHz Athlon.

Both companies have publicly said that their 1-GHz chips will come in the second half or the middle of this year.

AMD has been able to speed up Athlon with relative ease, according to a number of analysts. Therefore, a counter-announcement that computer makers will release 1-GHz Athlon PCs in the near future wouldn't be a surprise.

Although chip speeds have accelerated faster than expected because of the race, the competition has created supply problems. Consumers and dealers have complained for a number of months that they cannot find enough of Intel's fastest Pentium IIIs. AMD has faced similar, but not nearly as extensive, shortages at the top end of the Athlon line.

The 1-GHz systems, therefore, could be a tight commodity. HP might start shipping these computers, but only a few customers will get their hands on them.

Volume production and sales of 1-GHz Pentium III systems is expected by the third quarter, according to Howard High, an Intel spokesman. Another Intel spokesman said that systems will appear shortly.

Of course, the value of these systems will be largely symbolic. Intel is still slated to come out with 866-MHz and a 933-MHz versions of the Pentium III.

"No one is going to jump the gun on the 933-MHz," deadpanned Linley Gwennap, principal at the Linley Group, adding, "The big question is who needs a 1-GHz processor."

At the Intel Developer Forum in Palm Springs in February, Intel showed off pre-production systems from Dell Computer, IBM and HP containing 1-GHz Pentium IIIs. Existence of pre-production computers means that 1-GHz chips exist and that all three companies have completed the basic design issues to produce 1-GHz systems commercially.

In the second half of the year, Intel will introduce the "Willamette" processor, the successor to the Pentium III, according to Albert Yu, senior vice president at Intel. Willamette will come out at 1-GHz or faster. Willamette is the code-name for the chip. The final brand name will likely leverage the Pentium brand.

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